

OFFICIAL CASEBOOK



Mysteries in the Middle

Reading Strategies for Middle School Students

Investigative notes for: *Operation Mascot Recovery*

If found, return to: *Detective Miller*

Welcome !

Welcome to our family literacy workshop- Mysteries in the Middle! We are so glad you're here. During this workshop the mysteries of effective reading will be revealed to you. Have you ever wondered how some people seem to read so well? You may think it's because they're smart. It's not. You may think they get the right answers because they're lucky. That's not it either. Effective reading doesn't just happen by chance. Or maybe you think it's because they know something others readers do not. Bingo! You're clueing in like a good detective. Effective readers are strategic readers. They understand that being a good reader doesn't just mean being able to read the words on the page. Strategic readers know how to use many different mental strategies. This helps them understand and apply more of what they read. Sometimes it's hard to learn these strategies because in a way, they're invisible. It's all going on inside the reader's mind where you can't see what's going on. But we're going to get a glimpse into the mind of a strategic reader during this workshop. Invisible strategies will be made visible to all of us. The strategic reader's name is Detective Miller, and this is his casebook. Work through the activities and you'll be a strategic reader too.

About This Workshop

Mysteries in the Middle (MnM) is an engaging reading workshop for middle school students, parents, and teachers. It brings schools and families together to actively participate in a fun but meaningful learning experience. Participants are welcomed to the workshop's "Hollywood sound stage" where, for the next two hours, they watch and take part in the mock filming of a movie called "Mysteries in the Middle". As the movie plot thickens, clues about the mysterious disappearance of Hometown Middle School's mascot are revealed when participants take part in reading strategy rehearsals. When it's discovered that the last page of the script is missing, the participants try to solve the caper using their newfound reading skills.

This workshop is an expansion of the highly-acclaimed Families Building Better Readers (FBBR) program offered by the Florida Department of Education's Just Read, Florida! office. The delivery of these workshops is managed by the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium. The lead developer is Dr. Angela Martin. This workshop is offered on an on-going basis to families across the state of Florida. In addition, train-the-trainer workshops are available to educators who wish to replicate these workshops on their own for their schools and districts.

For More Information

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Detective Miller's

Reading Strategies Exhibit List

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EXHIBIT 1

Use of Graphic Organizers

Name: <i>Custodian Carol</i>	
Occupation: <i>Custodian...naturally</i>	
Status: <i>Witness</i>	
Notes:	
	
The Mystery:	So many clues, so little organization. I'm clueless what to do! How do strategic readers keep information and details straight?
Strategy to Investigate:	Informational Chart
Clues:	Graphic organizers help readers keep complex information organized in their thoughts so that they can better understand what they read. An informational chart is one type of graphic organizer.
Mystery Solved: Fill in the clues you gather during this mystery in the informational chart provided.	

Informational Chart

Witness	Facts/Clues	Possible Inferences
Custodian Carol	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Victim is an aardvark. 2. Usually kept in science wing. 3. Last seen Friday afternoon. 4. Discovered missing Monday morning. 5. Set of muddy track shoe prints found. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aardvark nabbed sometime over the weekend. • Whoever did it left muddy track shoe prints behind.
Cheerleader	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cheerleader left the rainy game _____ with aardvark. 2. Her dad saw her put the aardvark in its _____. 3. Unidentified person seen _____ really fast towards the science wing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ didn't take mascot. • Suspicious runner near the crime scene may be the one who left the _____ prints.
Pet Store Owner	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aardvark was nabbed around _____ p.m. 2. Aardvarks require _____ care. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. If cornered, they _____ with sharp claws. b. Eat mostly termites, not _____. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nabber would have _____ from capturing the aardvark. • Nabber would find out how to care for aardvark from the rare _____.
Art Teacher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The guard described the suspect as a _____. 2. Something was _____ under the warthog's arm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upright walking suspect is not likely a real warthog, so must have been a _____. • Suspect could be the _____ mascot. • Might have been the _____ wiggling under the arm.
Librarian	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Someone checked out the _____ on caring for mascots. 2. That person used a _____ I.D. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person who took the aardvark is most likely the same person who checked out the _____ book. • Someone from _____ nabbed the aardvark.
Track Coach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Todd is a very _____. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ could have been the fast runner seen by the cheerleader and guard.

EXHIBIT 2

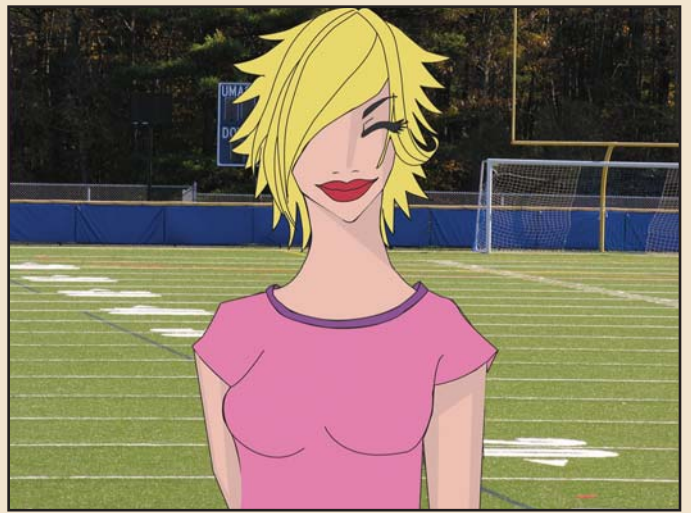
Identifying the Main Idea

Name: Paris Econolodge

Occupation: Cheerleader

Status: Witness, suspect

Notes:



The Mystery:

Sometimes there are so many details it's hard to figure out the main idea. How do strategic readers find main ideas when they are hidden within a lot of supporting information? It's like finding a needle in a haystack!

Strategy to Investigate:

Save the Last Word for Me

Clues:

A main idea captures what a passage is really about. Middle school reading expert, Kylene Beers, developed a strategy she calls, "Save the Last Word for Me" to give readers a way for determining the main idea. It works because it gives you an opportunity to think deeply and say what you think about a text.

Mystery Solved:

1. Read the first two pages of the book *Hoot* out loud with at least two other people.
2. Have each person make a very brief comment about the entire passage. Listen to what each person says.
3. After everyone has had a turn to comment, work on your own. Do the following two things:
 - a. Underline one or two sentences in the passage that you felt were significant.
 - b. Explain why you chose this part of the passage in the space provided below.
4. When everyone is finished with this individual task, ask each person to tell what he or she wrote under the heading "I underlined this particular part of the passage because..." No one may comment during this part of the strategy rehearsal...You get the last word!
5. What you hear shared will be main ideas.
6. I underlined this particular part of the passage because...

Pages 1 & 2 from Carl Hiassen's book, *Hoot...*

Roy would not have noticed the strange boy if it weren't for Dana Matherson, because Roy ordinarily didn't look out the window of the school bus. He preferred to read comics and mystery books on the morning ride to Trace Middle.

But on that day, a Monday (Roy would never forget), Dana Matherson grabbed Roy's head from behind and pressed his thumbs into Roy's temple, as if he were squeezing a soccer ball. The older kids were supposed to stay in the back of the bus, but Dana had snuck up behind Roy's seat and ambushed him. When Roy tried to wriggle free, Dana mushed his face against the window.

It was then, squinting through the smudged glass, that Roy spotted the strange boy running along the sidewalk. It appeared as if he was hurrying to catch the school bus, which had stopped at a corner to pick up more kids.

The boy was straw blond and wiry, and his skin was nut brown from the sun. The expression on his face was intent and serious. He wore a faded Miami Heat basketball jersey and dirty khaki shorts, and here was the odd part: no shoes. The soles of his bare feet looked as black as barbecue coals.

Trace Middle School didn't have the world's strictest dress code, but Roy was pretty sure that some sort of footwear was required. The boy might have been carrying sneakers in his backpack, if only he'd been wearing a backpack. No shoes, no backpack, no books—strange, indeed, on a school day.

Roy was sure that the barefoot boy would catch all kinds of grief from Dana and the other big kids once he boarded the bus, but that didn't happen...

Because the boy kept running — past the corner, past the line of students waiting to get on the bus; past the bus itself. Roy wanted to shout, "Hey, look at that guy!" but his mouth wasn't working so well. Dana Matherson still had him from behind, pushing his face against the window.


As the bus pulled away from the intersection, Roy hoped to catch another glimpse of the boy farther up the street. However, he had turned off the sidewalk and was now cutting across a private yard—running very fast, much faster than Roy could run and maybe even faster than Richard, Roy's best friend back in Montana. Richard was so fast that he got to work out with the high school track squad when he was only in seventh grade.

Dana Matherson was digging his fingernails into Roy's scalp, trying to make him squeal, but Roy barely felt a thing. He was gripped with curiosity as the running boy dashed through one neat green yard after another, getting smaller in Roy's vision as he put a wider distance between himself and the school bus.

EXHIBIT 3

Context Clues Think aloud

Name:	Maven
Occupation:	Pet Expert
Status:	Expert witness
Notes:	



The Mystery:	Strategic readers seem to magically figure out the meanings of words they don't know. How do they do it?
Strategy to Investigate:	Context Clues and Thinking-Aloud
Clues:	When strategic readers come across words they don't know, they look at other words in the sentences around that word to determine the meaning of unknown words. They also rely on what they already know about the topic in general to deduce possible meanings for unknown words.

Mystery Solved:

Do you want the good news or the bad news first? The good news is: The coffee spills weren't that bad after all - I can actually read the words on the page. Maven must have been drinking caffeine-free. Ha ha. The bad news is, I STILL can't figure out what the stained words mean. We'll practice the strategy of using context clues by doing the following:

1. Read the aardvark passage.
2. Look at the words in the sentences surrounding each coffee-stained word to help determine its meaning.
3. Think about how the other words. These are your context clues. Can you use them to come up with an educated guess for the word you don't know?
4. For each unknown word, come up with a definition that makes sense. The definition doesn't have to be exact, just close.

UNKNOWN WORDS: After using context clues what do you think each word means?

Endemic	_____
Nocturnal	_____
Protractile	_____
Saliva	_____
Excavates	_____

The Mighty Fighting Aardvark

Aardvarks in the Wild

The name aardvark comes from a word meaning "earth pig." Although the aardvark is endemic to Africa, it only shares some similarities with the South American anteater. The aardvark and the anteater are not actually related.

Aardvarks will not eat ants unless termites, their main source of food, are unavailable.

Aardvarks are nocturnal, usually waiting until dark before they emerge from their burrows. They go from one termite mound to another, dismantling the hills with their powerful claws. Insects are captured deep in the hill by the aardvark's long protractile tongue, which is covered with a thick, sticky saliva. Sometimes the aardvark will press its snout against an opening in a mound and just suck up the termites.

When in danger the aardvark retreats to the nearest hole, or rapidly excavates one, pushing the dirt backwards with its feet and moving the dirt away with its tail. But if cornered, it will defend itself by lying on its back and striking out with its claws on all four feet.

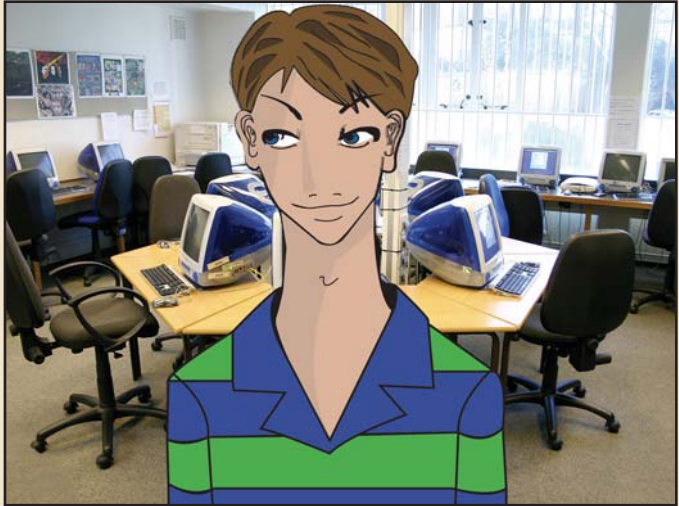

Aardvarks in Your School

So, if your school's mascot is an aardvark, you should keep the following three items in mind:

1. Have lots of termites on hand.
2. Never ever ever ever try to catch your aardvark by cornering it in its cage. It WILL scratch you with all four claws.
3. Keep your aardvark away from its mortal enemy the warthog.

EXHIBIT 4

Visualization: The Prior-Knowledge Advantage

Name: That "Blues Clues Guy... what's his name again?	
Occupation: Art Teacher	
Status: Expert witness	
Notes:	
The Mystery:	Some people seem to know what a text is about even before they read it. Where can I get some of this magic?
Strategy to Investigate:	Visualization and Activating Prior-Knowledge
Clues:	<p>Strategic readers imagine scenes in their minds as they read. It's like they are Hollywood directors looking through their movie cameras while a scene plays out. They imagine what characters, scenery, and actions might look like. This strategy is called visualization. If you use this strategy, you can recall more details about what you read, especially if you have a good imagination.</p> <p>Strategic readers also think about what they already know about a topic before they read a passage. This is called activating your schema or prior-knowledge. Good reading requires you to engage in a two-way interactive process with the text. You do this by using your prior-knowledge. Use the THIEVES handout to guide you in practicing this strategy.</p>
<p>Mystery Solved:</p> <p>Listen to the director read the security guard's report. It describes the suspect he saw running away from the science wing the night the mascot was nabbed. Draw what you visualize in the space provided.</p> <p>After you've drawn your picture, look at the art teacher's picture, did you draw the same suspect? Why or why not?</p>	

T.H.I.E.V.E.S.

The THIEVES strategy helps you preview textbooks by activating your prior knowledge.

T- Title.

Often skipped entirely by readers, the title is the entrance into a chapter. Titles most often state the topic and establish a context. Although you can't always "judge a book by its cover", readers can garner a great deal from a book's title.

H- Headings.

Headings are the gateway to the important general subject areas within a chapter. They are the visible organizers of the content.

I- Introduction.

The introduction typically provides a framework into which the chapter context may be placed. It offers a background and setting for the text. Chapter goals and objectives are often stated in the introduction.

E- Every first sentence in a paragraph.

These are often the topic sentences.

V- Visuals and vocabulary.

A picture can be worth a thousand words. Translating the visual presentations (photographs, charts, graphs, maps, tables) into words enables readers to begin learning about the topic even before they have begun to read.

E- End of chapter questions.

Study questions at the end of a chapter often flag important points and concepts. Knowledge of the questions ahead of time helps direct and establish a purpose for reading.

S- Summary.

Summaries provide a general frame of reference for the detailed content of the chapter. Readers can more easily understand and recall information about subjects when they have prior knowledge. Summaries can help provide this prior knowledge.


Based in part on a handout found in the following source:

Building Better Comprehension Habits in Grades 6-12: A Toolkit of Classroom Activities
by Jeff Zwiers.

EXHIBIT 5

High-Interest Reading Survey, Importance of Reading Practice & Reading Recommendations for Pre-Teens

Name: Tom Snooze	
Occupation: Librarian	
Status: Material witness	
Notes:	



The Mystery:	Some people seem to really enjoy reading. I don't get it. What's up with that?
Strategy to Investigate:	20 Question Reading Survey
Clues:	<p>People who read a lot do so because they know how to choose books that interest them. Because they are interested in the topics of the books they choose, they practice reading a lot. Because they practice a lot, they become even better readers. Because they are good at reading, they enjoy reading more than ever. It's a snowball effect!</p> <p>There's actually no mystery to becoming a good reader: it simply takes practice. Reading experts say that middle schoolers should spend a minimum of 20 minutes a day practicing reading outside of school to become fluent readers.</p>
Mystery Solved: <p>The purpose of this reading-interest survey is to start you thinking about yourself and the types of books you may be interested in reading. Fill in your survey at home and then share your results with your parent(s).</p>	

20 Question Reading Survey

1. Do you like to read? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. How much time do you spend reading outside of school hours each day?
☐ > One hour ☐ > 30 minutes ☐ Around 20 minutes ☐ < 10 minutes ☐ None
3. Do you have a library card? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Do you use it? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. About how many books do you own? _____
6. What are some books you would like to own? Name at least two.
a. _____
b. _____
7. Put a check mark by the kinds of books that interest you. Check at least three.
- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action/Adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel | <input type="checkbox"/> Drama | <input type="checkbox"/> Mystery/Thriller |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> Supernatural | <input type="checkbox"/> History | <input type="checkbox"/> War/Military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fantasy | <input type="checkbox"/> Folktales | <input type="checkbox"/> Western | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-fiction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horror | <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports | <input type="checkbox"/> Real Life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Humor/Comedy | <input type="checkbox"/> Plays | <input type="checkbox"/> Biography | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romance | <input type="checkbox"/> Anime | <input type="checkbox"/> Poetry | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science Fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> Comedy | <input type="checkbox"/> How-to Books | |
8. How many books have you read in the last six months?
☐ > 15 ☐ 10- 14 ☐ 6-9 ☐ 3-5 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ None
9. Name a person you would like to know more about (historical figure, sports figure, celebrity, etc.)

10. Name a time or period/event in history that you would like to know more about (Ancient Egypt, Middle Ages, Apartheid, Vietnam War, WWI, WWII, etc)

11. List your spare time activities (Hobbies, sports, extra-curricular activities, etc.)

12. What is your favorite book of all time?

13. Why is it your favorite?

20 Question Reading Survey (cont'd)

14. Do you like to read the newspaper? If yes, put a check mark next to the sections you enjoy.

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisements | <input type="checkbox"/> Headlines | <input type="checkbox"/> Current Events | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comic Strips | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports | <input type="checkbox"/> Columnists | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editorials | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |

15. What is your favorite television program? _____

16. On average how much time do you spend watching television and/or playing video games each day?

- ☐ > 8 hours ☐ 6-8 hours ☐ 4-5 hours ☐ 2-3 hours ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ < One hour ☐ None

17. What is your favorite magazine? _____

18. When you were little, did you enjoy having someone read to you? ☐ Yes ☐ No

19. What does the word "reading" mean to you?

20. Say anything else you would like to about reading:

The Reading Practice Pledge


(Hold up your "book hands" and repeat after the director):

On my honor, I promise, to read classic literature, for two hours, every day... (Okay let's get real, we know that's not going to happen)

(Let's try this one instead)... On my honor, I promise, to just read something, that's anything at all, for at least 20 minutes every day.

EXHIBIT 6

Timed Reading Races

Name: Hillary Buff	
Occupation: Track Coach	
Status: Material witness	
Notes:	
The Mystery:	When some people read out loud it seems so smooth and effortless. How do they do that?
Strategy to Investigate:	Timed Reading Races
Clues:	Doing timed races improves your fluency. Fluency is the ability to read smoothly, accurately, and with expression. Fluent readers understand more of what they read because it is easier for their brains to follow reading that “sounds” like the way people normally talk.
Mystery Solved: Follow the directions below to rehearse this reading strategy: <h3>Directions for Timed Reading Races</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Select a page from a text that is on your reading level that you think will take you at least one minute (but no more than three minutes) to read.2. Ask your parent or some other adult to time you reading the page. Try to read quickly, but carefully, and with expression.3. Ask the person timing you to keep a count of every mistake you make. Count these kinds of mistakes- misreading the word, sounding out the word instead of reading it instantly, skipping the word.4. Add the number of errors you made to the number of seconds it took you to read the page.5. Record your score on the chart provided.6. Read the same passage three to five days in a row, recording your score each time.	

Practice passage adapted from the book *Freaky Friday*:

You are not going to believe me, nobody in their right minds could possibly believe me, but it's true! When I woke up this morning, I found I'd turned into my mother. There I was, in my mother's bed, with my feet reaching all the way to the bottom. I had on my mother's night gown, and a ring on my left hand, I mean her left hand, and lumps and pins all over my head. "I think that must be the rollers," I said to myself, "and if I have my mother's hair, I probably have her face, too."

Reading Race Score Sheet

1. Read your passage quickly, but carefully.
2. Count # of seconds it takes you to read passage.
3. Add # of mistakes to the # of seconds.
4. Record your score each day for 5 days in a row.
5. Pat yourself on the back every time your score improves.

Scoring Chart

Passage	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5

Summarizing and Synthesizing

Encore!

Reviewing What We've Learned

Thank you for being a part of our Mysteries in the Middle workshop. We hope you enjoyed this family/school event and learned new ways to set your child up for successful reading practice at home.

Let's review the top ten ideas highlighted during this workshop:

Good readers...

1. Make sense of the information they read by using graphic organizers.
2. Know how to draw inferences from the facts they read.
3. Use strategies such as "Save the Last Word for Me" to determine the main idea of a passage.
4. Use context clues to figure out the meanings of unknown words.
5. Visualize the storyline in their minds to improve understanding.
6. Preview what they read before they read it to activate their schema or prior knowledge.
7. Know to choose books for reading practice that interest them.
8. Practice reading at least 20 minutes every day outside of school.
9. Improve their speed and accuracy when reading by doing timed reading races.
10. Actively think while they are reading by asking questions, summarizing, and synthesizing.

Character images created by Morgan Swim
Countryside High School, Clearwater, Florida

Panhandle Area Educational Consortium

